

February 14, 1970

Pollution charge made at Flathead

KALISPELL (AP) — Supervisor J. M. Pomajevich of the Flathead National Forest reported Friday that tests show excessive amounts of fluoride pollution in plant tissues in the Columbia Falls area.

The pollution allegedly is caused by operations of the Anaconda Aluminum Co. plant at Columbia Falls.

Fluoride was found in excessive amounts in plant tissue more than 10 miles from the aluminum plant, primarily in a north and east direction, Pomajevich reported.

The latest samples were collected last November and were analyzed by the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation, Madison, Wis., he said.

Based on the test results, Pomajevich said, the U.S. Forest Service will continue to evaluate fluoride damage in the Flathead forest.

"Vegetation in the vicinity of Columbia Falls is exhibiting blight symptoms. Dieback of terminal portions of trees and shrubs contribute to an enduring, increasing brownish appearance in the forested flatlands and mountainous areas near the town. Over 3,000 acres of national forestland appears to be affected," the official reported.

He said the study, started in June of 1969, includes both national forest and national park lands within 10 miles of Columbia Falls.

Two study plots have been established 30 miles west and 30 miles south of the town to serve as control plots for comparison with the findings closer to Columbia Falls, he said.

The additional study, he said, will investigate fluoride damage to trees and possible associated disease outbreak. "Shrubs, grasses and perennial herbs will also be studied because of their importance in the food chain for wildlife and possible importance of their loss to watershed values," he continued.

He said an entomological study will evaluate changes in the forest insect population and fluoride accumulation in insects. "If fluorine is found in insect tissues, injury may result to birds, fish and mammals that feed upon these insects."

Pomajevich said complete sampling for trees, shrubs, grass and insects will be done in April, June and October this year. A partial sampling will be conducted in July 1971 and results of chemical analysis of foliage and insect samples are expected to be available in the fall of 1971, he added.

Fluoride pollution allegedly caused by the aluminum refining plant has been a subject of continuing controversy and also is under study by the State Health Department.

Anaconda Aluminum Co. has claimed it is doing everything within its ability to control fluoride emissions.